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ABSTRACT

Supporters of the "back to basics" movement have suggested that educators are spending more time on "nonessential" subjects and less time on the basic subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics. To test the validity of this belief, a study was conducted to determine the actual amount of time teachers were giving to each of the basic subjects in the elementary school curriculum. All elementary school teachers in one educational region in Iowa were asked to complete questionnaires that elicited information on grade level taught, classroom arrangement used, and the estimated amount of time devoted to each subject in the curriculum. The results indicated that primary grade teachers spent more time on instruction in the basic skills than did intermediate grade teachers, but the majority of that time was devoted to reading instruction. Intermediate grade teachers, however, spent more time on instruction in arithmetic and writing than did primary grade teachers. In general, the study revealed that teachers were not neglecting the basics. (FL)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TIME STUDY

Supporters of the "back-to-the-basics" movement have suggested that Iowa educators are diluting the curriculum with non-essentials and are spending less and less time on the basic subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Criticisms such as this, whether justified or not, are always based upon some assumptions which exist in the mind of the observer. However, whether the criticisms are justified or not depends greatly upon the accuracy of those assumptions. Therefore, rather than merely assume, without evidence, that the schools are indeed devoting less instructional time to a given subject area, information about instructional time allotments was sought directly from teachers.

Collection of this data (time allotments) is however not without its problems. Individual teachers and schools have much freedom in determining their daily schedules and programs. There is interest in keeping the program flexible. Many teachers purposely and effectively attempt to integrate, correlate, and fuse the subject fields. In this study the questionnaire sent to the classroom teachers listed each of the subject areas separately and asked teachers to estimate the time spent as if they were taught separately. In spite of this directive, some teachers responded to the questionnaire in a way which allowed them to report their intent to integrate and correlate subject areas.

History of Time Studies

There have been only two time allotment studies done in Iowa schools in recent decades. In 1954, a committee appointed by the Iowa State Superintendent of Public Instruction collected data on "preferred" time

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allotments. This study[1] collected data from a selected group of school administrators, supervisors, and curriculum directors. It attempted to find the best time allotments rather than all practices.

The second study on time allotments was also sponsored by the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction. It was conducted in 1963 and is reported in a publication titled Time Allotment for Elementary School Subjects by Herbert F. Spitzer. This second study also gathered data on preferred rather than actual time allotments. Data for the study were gathered from schools which are members of the North Central Associations of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Data were requested from school principals and from classroom teachers designated as outstanding by their school superintendent. The directions sent to the schools with the questionnaires clearly emphasized that the time allotment sought was to be the desirable allotment not the actual time being spent.

Unlike the two previous time allotment studies, the study reported in this paper does not attempt to determine what teachers and administrators think is a most desirable time allotment for each subject area but seeks to determine how much time teachers are actually allotting for direct instruction in each of the subject areas. This report is written to give Iowa administrators, curriculum planners, and teachers more accurate information about time given to direct instruction. This information, it is assumed, will be helpful in interpreting pupil assessment data and in curriculum planning.

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[1]The results of this study were published in Resource Ideas for Planning Classroom Programs (1955), out of print.

Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the amount of time given to the instruction of each of the various "subjects" within the elementary school curriculum.

Methodology

The target population in this study was all the elementary "classroom teachers" in the schools served by the Area Education Agency #7. Only classroom teachers and resource room teachers were asked to complete and return the questionnaire. Information regarding the grade-level taught and the kind of assignment (self-contained, departmentalized, etc.) was sought so that it would be possible to determine if there were some relationships between the amount of time spent on a given subject area and the grade level or the nature of the teaching assignment.

Results of the Study

In general, it was found that teachers are not neglecting the basics. They are, in many instances, spending more class time on instruction in the basic skill areas than was recommended as a "preferred" time allotment in the 1963 study. See Chart 1 for mean amount of instructional time spent per week on specific subjects. For a comparison of mean amounts of instructional time spent by teachers as reported in this study and the preferred time allotments established in the 1963 study, see Chart 2.

Chart #1

MEAN NUMBER OF MINUTES SPENT ON INSTRUCTION
PER WEEK IN EACH SUBJECT AREA

Subject /Grade	Kdg	1	2	3	4	5	6	all grades combined
Spelling	17	76	84	96	103	105	93	94.8
Arithmetic	81	188	199	221	229	244	244	210.8
Art	97	56	49	49	50	50	47	54
Lunch Break	125	140	130	147	131	141	119	135.7
Reading	174	496	514	409	307	269	272	363.7
Listening skills	116	115	73	101	68	73	79	94
Social Studies	61	78	81	129	170	207	206	140.3
Physical Education	61	61	81	60	69	71	77	68.6
Handwriting	53	101	63	71	55	54	64	68.8
Music	77	60	87	63	65	62	61	67.4
Recess	125	223	218	181	144	132	146	177.0
English:Writing and speaking skills	86	100	149	152	165	161	186	151.3
Health	34	42	38	55	75	89	89	62.8
Science	42	63	57	84	95	106	115	83.7
Social Living Skills	82	81	48	80	53	30	70	64.3

Mean time spent on each subject area---a comparison*of present time allotments to preferred times on 1963 study.

Subject area/Grade	Number of minutes spent each week Kdg	1	2	3	4	5	6
Spelling	17	76 (74)	84(79)	96(90)	105(94)	105(90)	93(91)
Arithmetic	81( )	188(141)	199(155)	221(200)	229(226)	244(233)	244(235)
Art	97( )	56(72)	49(61)	49(68)	50(63)	50(62)	47(66)
Lunch Break	125	140	130	147	131	141	119
Reading	174 ()	496(597	514(602)	409(413)	301(286)	269(254)	272(240)
Listening skills	116	115	73	101	68	73	79
Social Studies	61	78(87)	81(90)	129(139)	170(200)	207(247)	206(237)
Physical Education	61	61(68)	81(66)	60(66)	69(72)	71(77)	77(81)
Handwriting	53	101(75)	63(63)	71(67)	55(48)	54(41)	64(43)
Music	77	60(76)	87(75)	63(69)	65(71)	62(71)	61(74)
Recess	125	223(135)	218(136)	181(129)	144(107)	132(103)	146(104)
English (Writing/ speaking)	86	100(78)	149(116)	152(138)	165(154)	161(157)	186(160)
Health	34	42	38	55	75	89	89
Science	42	63	57	84	95	106	115
Social Living Skills	82	81	48	80	53	30	70

* Numbers listed are number of minutes spent each week, while numbers listed in parentheses are number of minutes per week suggested in 1963 in the preferred time study.

Teachers in the primary grades spend more of their time on instruction in the basic skill areas than do intermediate grade teachers. The major portion of this time, however, is spent on reading instruction. Intermediate-grade teachers, on the other hand, spend more time on instruction in arithmetic and writing than do primary teachers. Chart 3 shows the comparison of instruction time allotments for primary and intermediate levels.

Chart 3

Instructional Time* Spent on Basic Skills**:
A Comparison of Primary and Intermediate Grades

Basic Skill	Primary				Intermediate			
	Grade				Grade			
	1	2	3	Avg.	4	5	6	Avg.
Writing	277	296	319	297	325	320	343	329
Reading	496	514	409	473	301	269	272	280
Arithmetic	188	199	221	202	229	244	244	239
			Total	976			Total	848

*Time is indicated in minutes per week.

**Basic Skills = (Reading) + (Writing: spelling, speaking, handwriting) + (Arithmetic).

See Chart 4 for more specific data regarding the amount of instructional time devoted to each specific language arts area. From this data several additional trends can be noted: (1) more time is spent on the instruction of writing skills at the upper grade levels than at the lower grade levels, and (2) less instructional time is spent, in total, on language arts instruction at the upper grade levels than at the lower grade levels.

Chart 4

Average Number of Minutes Spent
on All Language Arts

Grade Level	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	All Grades
				Number of Minutes				
English/ Writing	86	100	149	152	165	161	186	151
Handwriting	53	101	63	71	55	54	64	68
Listening	116	115	73	101	68	73	79	94
Reading	174	496	514	409	301	269	272	263
Spelling	17	16	84	96	105	105	93	94
Total	446	888	883	829	694	662	694	770
Per Day	89	177	176	165	138	132	138	154

Related Data

In order to more fully understand the work day of teachers in relation to the instructional efforts in the basic skill areas, additional data about planning time, special resource teachers, and school organization was sought.

Of those teachers responding to the survey, the greatest number were self-contained classroom teachers.

Chart 5

Teaching Assignment*

Type of Assignment	Percent of Teachers
Self-contained classroom	71.0
Departmentalized	12.5
Team Teaching	13.4

*Iowa Schools: Area Education Agency 7.

Elementary teachers have traditionally not had special time set aside in the school day for planning. This seems to continue to be the case. Forty-three percent of the teachers responding to the survey indicated that they had only 0-2 hours planning time per week. Thirty-three percent reported 3-4 hours.

Chart 6

Planning Time

Number of Hours of Planning Time per Week	Percent of Teachers
0-2	43.2
3-4	33.1
5-6	5.3
7-8	3.9

In addition to the instructional duties they perform, elementary teachers are frequently asked to carry out certain non-teaching duties. The following chart summarizes the extent of their involvement in these activities.

Chart 7

Non-Teaching Duties Performed by Teachers

Type of Duty	Percent Indicating They Performed These Duties
Lunch duty	10.3
Hall duty	11.7
Bus duty	10.3
Safety	2.2
Extracurricular activities	10.0
Curriculum development	37.0
Student government	3.6
Miscellaneous	14.6

In summary the elementary schools surveyed in this study are not neglecting the basic skill areas. In fact, more instructional time is being spent in many of the basic areas now than was recommended in the preferred time studies of the 1960's.

Teachers in the primary grades spent more time on instruction in the basic skills than do intermediate teachers. However, intermediate teachers spend more time on arithmetic and writing skills.

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